

n network

HUMANITIES

Featured in This Issue

1

Marin County project highlights affordable housing crisis.

3

CCH seeks Hurricane Katrina-related proposals for December round of funding.

6

The perspectives of immigrant teens in Santa Ana.



stories

COMMUNITIES SPEAK PROJECT REVEALS COUNTY'S DIVERSITY, PUTS HUMAN FACE ON HOUSING CRISIS

They drive large SUVs, ride \$3,000 road bikes and live in lavish, exorbitantly priced homes. Or do they? Who are these people who reside in Marin County, that idyllic place just north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge with oodles of open space and abundant natural beauty. And what does the idea of home mean to them?

These are the questions at the heart of an exhibit sponsored by the Marin Arts Council that uses stories to look at the issue of affordable housing in Marin, challenging the prevailing stereotype that Marinites are all of a piece — privileged, wealthy and mainly white. Called "Finding Marin: Stories of Home," the exhibit, sponsored by the Marin Arts Council and involving a number of organizations in Marin, is the culmination of a three-year story-gathering effort and one of eight Communities Speak projects across the state funded by the Council under its California Stories initiative.

Top left: The Ayala family in the courtyard of their Greenbrae apartment.
Top right: Eric Saibel, a Spanish teacher at Tamalpais High School. Photos/Robert Bengtson Photography

continued on page 4

Immigrant Teens in Santa Ana Point Cameras at Their Own Lives



Photo/Guillermo Arroyo, age 17.

INNOVATIVE PROJECT INVOLVES PROFESSIONAL WRITERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

They were high school seniors in Santa Ana, Calif., a predominantly Latino city; most were born in Mexico or Central America, and all believed themselves invisible to people outside their immediate communities. All that changed this past year when the teens had a

chance to tell their stories as part of a writing and photography project funded by the Council to give voice to California's immigrant and refugee youth.

The project, called "Aqui. Ahora: Portraits from Santa Ana High School," engaged 80 students from Santa Ana High School in workshops led by professional writers and photographers and culminated in exhibits of the teens' work at the kids' school and at a local museum and library.

"The goal of the project," said Project Director Sue Cronmiller, "was to give the participants a sense of pride in their own life

continued on page 3

The California Council for the Humanities is a state-based affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. *Humanities Network* is published quarterly and mailed to anyone who requests it from the San Francisco office.

FAITH IN STRANGERS

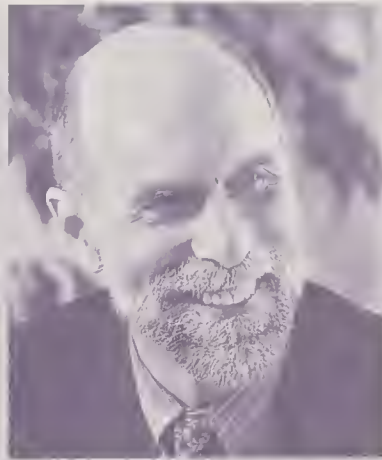
By James Quay, Executive Director

In a few weeks, board and staff members from humanities councils will gather in San Francisco to attend the 2005 National Humanities Conference. The theme of the conference this year comes from an observation by historian Taylor Branch that democracy requires "faith in strangers." Americans, he said, "have more faith in strangers embedded in our traditions and in our fundamental philosophy than most of us care to contemplate."

When we were planning the conference more than a year ago, we could not have anticipated that a hurricane would underscore the truth of the theme so dramatically. American culture is composed of the yin of self-reliance and the yang of participation in community, strains present in both stories about our founding and in those about our contemporary experience. Stories and scenes from the Gulf Coast states have illustrated both in abundance.

Speaking with my colleagues in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana was like moving from the edge of the hurricane to its eye. In Alabama, only the immediate coast suffered, and the word was, "We're OK." In Mississippi, the lower third of the state was devastated, a dozen libraries destroyed, museums and their collections ruined. The Mississippi Humanities Council was closed for a week and then moved to convene a meeting of affected cultural organizations to assess the damage and begin to formulate a response. From Louisiana came an e-mail with a stark assessment: "We are destroyed." One and a half million people displaced. New Orleans flooded for weeks. The private sector gone, and reluctant to return without guarantees that levees would be rebuilt. And I am not now speaking of homes destroyed and lives upturned.

Writing in *The Chronicle Review*, Professor Lynne Adrian of the University of Alabama points out how such disasters expose the positive and negative sides of American values. We respond because we know that it could have been us. Viewing the scenes of suffering is almost like viewing tragic drama — it inspires pity and fear, in Aristotle's famous formulation. Pity that someone is suffering out of all proportion to what they may have deserved and fear that the same fate could befall us. The



CCH Executive Director Jim Quay

only way to block this human response is to convince yourself that the victims are NOT like us or somehow deserved what befell them. But to do so is to abandon the human solidarity that underlies every human institution and makes faith in strangers possible.

So we respond immediately as separate individuals, rushing to contribute to organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army, relying on them to act on our behalf to turn the concern of separate strangers into food or water or medical care for those in need.

Next, organizations began to join together, museums helping museums to care for and restore damaged collections and provide support until their local support systems are once again in place. But, finally, a calamity of this scale must also be addressed by the third circle of strangers: the democratic institutions we support as taxpayers and voters, the ones that build levees, that approve reconstruction, that police streets.

A necessary civic debate, just now beginning, will address questions of ways our response to Katrina exposed holes in the fabric of American democracy, ways that we failed our fellow citizens and undermined our democratic faith in strangers. I visited New Orleans only once, but I was profoundly impressed by the city's music, its architecture, its food and the graciousness of everyone I met. I think it would be appropriate if Americans ensured that one of the most famous lines from the most famous play set in New Orleans — "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" — doesn't become a reproach to us strangers.

James Quay

CCH seeking Hurricane Katrina-related proposals

The Council is pleased to announce that for the upcoming California Story Fund funding cycle, special consideration will given to proposals that use the humanities to document stories of Gulf Coast residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina now living in California. For such projects, the Council will award up to \$15,000.

The deadline for California Story Fund applications remains the same — December 1, 2005. An application is now available on the Council's website. Applications must be received in the Council office by 5 pm on December 1.

The California Story Fund is our grant line supporting public humanities projects that bring to light new and compelling stories from California's diverse communities. For information about California Story Fund projects, please visit our website at www.californiastories.org.

Council will meet in San Francisco in December

The California Council for the Humanities quarterly meeting will take place on Thursday, December 8 in San Francisco. The meeting begins at 9:30 am. For confirmation and additional details, please contact the San Francisco office at 415/391-1474.

New organizational effectiveness coordinator

Jody Sahota joined the CCH staff in September as organizational effectiveness coordinator. Sahota was born and raised in Toronto, Canada, and moved to California this past spring after spending a year traveling around the world with her husband. In Canada, Sahota spent six years at TD Canada Trust Financial Institution, most recently as a general ledger officer, maintaining and balancing internal accounts for 10 major branches of the bank. In her CCH position, Sahota will divide her time between grants management and organizational effectiveness duties. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in English literature from the University of Toronto.



Santa Ana Teens (continued from page 1)

stories and communities, and a sense of inclusion in California, and, by extension, the United States. We also wanted to provide the kids with a set of skills and perspectives that would sustain and enhance their future."

Cronmiller, a writing instructor at UC Irvine and a professional poet, is founder and director of the project's sponsor, PoetryXchange, an alliance of writers and artists seeking to empower at-risk youth through poetry-based education, publication and community activities.

Using photographs to teach writing

Cronmiller and poet Allison Miller, writer-instructors for PoetryXchange and graduates of UC Irvine's graduate program in writing, embarked on the writing portion of the project with two senior English classes at Santa Ana High in fall 2004. Their goal was to have the kids create their own personal narratives. To accomplish this, they used a variety of approaches, including showing kids documentary photographs.

Among the photographs the kids saw was a series of portraits of

residents of Chavez Ravine, taken by Don Normark in 1949, years before that community was bulldozed to make way for Dodger Stadium. "A lot of kids didn't even know that a neighborhood had existed there," recalled Miller, "so we talked about that, and how photographs can document a community — and asked them how they would document Santa Ana.

"We also spent time discussing Normark's photograph of a sad-looking woman sitting in a chair in an empty room, and had the kids tell us what they knew about the woman just from her surroundings



Photo/Sam Flores, age 17.

— and where they would want their own portraits to be. We wanted them to see how they could tell a story through the visual elements of a place, and that place was emblematic of who a person was."

Cronmiller and Miller worked with the kids for eight weeks, stressing the importance of using vivid details and imagery. The teens wrote about things important to them — places they loved in their own countries, how their parents met, the things they would change in their lives. They also created their own self-portraits. "I think the writing we got from the students was beautiful," Cronmiller said. "All the students had stories to tell."

Learning from a noted photographer

In January 2005, *Los Angeles Times* staff photographer Don Bartletti kicked off the photography portion of the project by giving a master class in photography.

Bartletti, who received a Pulitzer Prize for "Enrique's Journey," a six-part series chronicling the migration of Central American kids to the United States, showed the students his "Enrique" photographs as well

as work he had done in Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. "He talked about composing photographs and what it's like to document people's lives, and he encouraged the kids to document their own lives," Miller remembered.

"He also showed them photographs he had taken in Santa Ana, including one shot of a guy sweeping his own property at dusk," Miller said. "He talked to the kids about how long he sat and waited until the light was exactly right and the guy was in the exact spot he wanted him to be in before taking the shot.

"One of the things he stressed was the importance of taking a lot of photographs. He told them that even as a professional photographer, out of 100 photographs he might take, maybe only one or two would be successful.

"The presentation had a big impact on the kids," Cronmiller said. "They asked a lot of questions, and I think they got a good feel for what's involved in taking a good photograph — and how a professional photographer works."

continued on page 6

Perspectives of Santa Ana Teens

Orlando Vences was born at dawn in Mexico City on March 26, 1987. He came to the United States at age 3 and is the oldest of three boys. Before joining the project, Orlando studied photography at Santa Ana High School. He is very interested in music.

I remember when my mom and my brothers and I left home forever. I wanted my little sandy-colored guitar. I cried for it, but we couldn't get it. It was behind the heavy wardrobe, so I cried as we left and got into the car to never look behind.

I live happily with my mom. She breaks her back to feed me and my brothers. When she comes home tired from cleaning houses, she runs to school to better her English.



Photo/Orlando Vences, age 18.

Diego Lopez is 17 years old. He was born in the United States to parents from Michoacan, Mexico. Diego has been writing since he was five. He hopes to become an English professor.

To me, the streets at night are safe. There is no man-made sound, just the sound of the cold wind and rain. I wander at night when no one can be heard or seen in the lonely streets. The full moon is out. I stop to look at it, and I can see it looking back at me, smiling, letting me know I am safe.



Photo/Diego Lopez, age 17.

I look at the surroundings and I see all sorts of different things. There are broken bottles on the ground, bums sleeping, water flowing down the street, leaves being blown all over the place. I see some leaves fall off a tree. I see the red hand blinking [on the traffic light], and what makes me comfortable is the carless street at night. The rain is trickling on my face.

Gabriela Esqueda was born in Zamora, Michoacan, Mexico. She is 18 years old and came to the United States when she was 4. She lived in Los Angeles for six years, returned to Mexico for two years and then moved to Santa Ana. She enjoys playing tennis, writing and reading. English is her favorite subject.

Waking up at 9 am everyday when the sun hits my face was a great feeling when I was in Mexico. Going downstairs, knowing my grandparents and my mom would be at the table discussing their plans for the day while drinking coffee, assured me it would be a typical day. Getting dressed and walking to the corner store where the owner had what I wanted ready for me to pick up was something I would never get tired of.

Saying "good morning" to the lady selling orange juice on the corner and all of my grandmother's neighbors, who have known me since the day I was born, made me feel right at home.

Guillermo Arroyo, 17, was born in Zamora, Michoacan, Mexico and came to this country when he was 3. After attending preschool and kindergarten in this country, he returned to Mexico, where he was bitten

continued on page 6

“The goal of the project,” said Marin Arts Council’s Executive Director Jeanne Bogardus, “was to look at the issue of affordable housing through a different lens, to use the arts – photography, poetry, film and exhibit design – to present and highlight stories gathered from a cross section of the community. The issue isn’t new. We just came at it from a different angle. We also wanted to show how diverse Marin is. There’s isn’t just one Marin. Marin is composed of many different communities. And that’s what makes it such an interesting place to live.”

The exhibit, which opened at the Marin Civic Center in September and is now at the Marin Com-

munity Foundation in Novato, portrays people who love their homes and communities but have deep concerns about housing costs, no matter what their economic situation. We meet a teacher, a postal employee, a musician, a park ranger, a hairdresser, a day laborer, a professional house-sitter, a dairy worker, a carpenter, a retiree.

For example, there’s Eric Saibel, a young Tamalpais High School teacher who says that the high cost of housing may eventually drive him from the place where he was born and raised; Cande Perra-Farina, an outreach worker and both a project interviewer and interviewee, who says if something were to happen to her or her



Ramon Ramirez of Nicasio at the dairy farm where he works. Photo/Robert Bengtson Photography

husband, they would be homeless in 30 days; Jose Morales, who rarely saw his children during the nine years he worked simultaneous jobs to buy his family a home; and 73-year-old Erv Holton, born and raised in Ross, who bought his house in 1960 but whose three grown sons can’t afford to live in the county.

Partners help find interviewers and interviewees

To help locate both interviewers and storytellers for the project, Bogardus enlisted the support of a number of organizations. They included the Dance Palace Community Center in Point Reyes Station, the Canal Alliance in the ethnically diverse Canal District in San Rafael, and the Ecumenical Association for Housing, a nonprofit public housing corporation that has managed and developed affordable housing for 27 years.

“This was a unique alliance of many different organizations, from housing advocates to artists to environmental groups, and all the partners were crucial in the success of this project,” Bogardus said. “We all contribute to the quality of life in Marin. But it confirmed for me that the Arts Council can be an agent for change, especially when we collaborate with other community institutions the way we did with this project.”

Leading the story-gathering effort was oral historian Alicia Rouverol, who served as co-director of the project along with Bogardus, and folklorist Margie Crawford-Ryan. “We wanted the interviews to represent the community, so we aimed for a balance of people from different backgrounds and walks of life — people from the ranching community in West Marin, Marin artists and environmentalists, established

Marinites, and new immigrants,” Rouverol said.

From the outset, Rouverol and Crawford-Ryan involved the community in every aspect of the project. “The interviewers weren’t Alicia and me. They were members of the community interviewing each other,” Crawford-Ryan said.

“There isn’t just one Marin. Marin is composed of many different communities. And that’s what makes it such an interesting place to live.”

With the help of community partners, Rouverol and Crawford-Ryan selected 10 people for the interview team. The team, whose participants ranged from community worker Ha Lu to rancher Linda Mendoza, underwent hours of training, learning to conduct interviews and operate equipment. Team members were also involved in the final selections of quotes and stories for the culminating exhibit and in editing a series of profiles for publication in a local newspaper.

“The interviewers were amazing,” Crawford-Ryan said. “They were completely dedicated to the project.”

Over the course of the project, the interviewers conducted 19 one-to-one interviews, while Rouverol and Crawford-Ryan, with the help of the project’s partners, gathered the stories of another 36 people in five story circles — small-group story-sharing sessions — held in different parts of the county.

“I would not trade it for anything in the world. I wouldn’t trade it. When I was 12 years old, I heard a resident of Marin City make the statement, ‘honey, these folks just don’t know what they have.’ This is the last slice of Eden. And Marin City is that to me. It is a beautiful place.”

Cathomas Starbird Ford, Marin City

“I just feel like we’re just getting pushed out. So I have a bit of an edge. I’m working on being gracious to the really new people coming who can afford to buy the million dollar homes while we’re sitting here basically working 80 hour weeks or whatever, and struggling. You know, just struggling.”

Kathy Runnion, Inverness

“Because I’m biracial, I never have felt like I fit in. But at the same time, that’s forced me to think more about fitting in than not fitting in. Whereas I think a lot of people who grow up in Marin don’t necessarily have to think about those sorts of things.”

Catherine Fong, San Rafael

“I actually have several boxes in my bedroom, still. I have them on the other side of the bed, so when you walk in, you don’t really see them. But they’re there because I always have that temporary feeling. Even though I’ve been there six years — there’s a lot of pictures I’d like to hang — but I don’t know, I just can’t seem to do it. I’m afraid that we’ll be given notice and have to move again.

Yes, there’s always that feeling of being temporary. That’s what’s really hard about renting.”

Marcia Levy, Novato

“I think part of it is that the communities resist it because they don’t know what ‘affordable housing’ means. They think it means a ‘project.’

I think it's how it's presented. If you went up and said, ‘Well, this is for your child's first grade teacher; the person who works in the library; someone who works at Marin General Hospital taking care of the rooms; or somebody who runs this nonprofit organization that doesn't have very much money.’ I think if you educate people about who they are and that it's not just, ‘This is just free housing that's being given away to people who are otherwise living on the streets,’ which is scary to some parts of the community when you say it. I think there's an education process.”

Dave Schrader, Mill Valley

Old Mill Park

They bring the kids in on strollers, wipe runny noses, endlessly push them on metal swings; open baggies of sliced apples, tofu hotdogs—organic things. This poem’s for the nannies who jump up and cheer, rushing to hug the whiney ones near. The nannies who dry the toddlers’ eyes then stand them up, and pitch ball after ball – offering encouragement when the bigger ones call. The nannies whose own kids remain back at home: looking after each other and watching TV, waiting for their moms whose job is to be there, bandaging some other kid’s knee.

Karen Benke

Photography for the project was handled by Marin photographer Robert Bengtson.

“Bengtson would call people and spend a day at people’s homes taking photographs and getting to know his subjects,” Bogardus recalled. “He really bonded with everyone, and the images show that. It’s the same thing that happened between interviewers and interviewees. They bonded with each other during the story-sharing process, and I think that was as important as the interviews themselves.”

“Everyone welcomed me into their home and I don’t think the feelings the photos convey would have been possible without that ” Bengtson said. “To see my images serve as a reaching out to the

community like this has been a real honor.”

Despite the wide range of storytellers, Bogardus was struck by the stories’ similarities. “Whether the person interviewed was struggling to make ends meet, or had managed to create and keep a home, what got repeated over and over is how much they love their home, how much they love the beauty of the place, how much they love their community,” Bogardus said.

“They want to stay, or at least feel like they have a chance of staying, but the reality is some people may not be able to. Many people are hanging on by a thread, some of them artists and musicians. Affordable housing is an issue that cuts across all economic levels. It affects our work force – teachers,



Rosa Loo and daughter Yeming in her home at Maria B. Freitas Senior Community. Photo/Robert Bengtson Photography

police officers, firefighters. My concern is that we will lose the fabric, texture and creativity that help define our culture and contribute to our quality of life.”

Doug Elliot, a developer from Point Reyes Station, wonders what kind of place Marin will become if everyone leaves except the wealthy. Interviewed for the project, he said that if that happens, “It will change the character [of Marin] so dramatically that we won’t have the place we’re trying to save.”

“Everyone we talked to had concerns about housing, and my hope is that the exhibit will inspire people to make their voices heard beyond their living rooms,” Crawford-Ryan said.

“I think what we’ve done is put a human face on the housing issue,” added Rouverol. “In a way we just dropped pebbles in the water. We don’t know what the reverbera-

tions will be. But I hope we’ll see a shift in people’s thinking about the issue. Sometimes things don’t change until policy-makers are forced to see what the cost really is to communities.”

Bogardus sees the project extending beyond the exhibit itself. “I want to get the participants together in small groups, to tell other members of the community what they’ve learned. We’ve met a lot of new people, and we don’t want to lose contact with them. One of our goals will be to keep those relationships.”

In addition to the main exhibit, “Finding Marin” features two other photography exhibits on the project’s themes; a video, currently in progress; and a booklet containing edited interviews, photographs from the exhibit and poems written especially for the project by more than a dozen Marin poets. The exhibit will be at the Marin Community Foundation in Novato through December. The booklet of the same name is available through the Marin Arts Council. For information about the project, visit www.marinarts.org or e-mail Jeanne Bogardus at Jeanne@marinarts.org.



Terrie Harris Green at her Marin City home. Photo/Robert Bengtson Photography

ONE MARINITE’S STORY



Douglas Mundo, Photo/Robert Bengtson Photography

FOR DOUGLAS MUNDO, THE STORYTELLING PROCESS IS A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE

As director of the Canal Welcome Center in San Rafael’s ethnically diverse Canal District, 32-year-old Douglas Mundo knew he would have a lot to say about Marin’s affordable housing crisis when “Finding Marin” interviewer Candalaria Perra-Farina approached him for an interview. What he didn’t realize was how much the process of telling his story would affect him.

“When I agreed to the interview, I was mad about what was happening in my community,” he said. “Ten to 12 people living in a two-room apartment and paying the highest rent, and often working many jobs. I had an opportunity in talking to Candalaria to express what I felt.”

Mundo, who emigrated from El Salvador five years ago, knows firsthand how difficult life is for Marin’s new immigrants. He lived in cramped apartments and worked as a painter, a gardener and a mover before he found his current job. “I know what it means to be under the sun, 6 am to 6 pm, to work in the rain when the weather is cold.”

He also knows how immigrants can be subjected to racial stereotyping. “Some people in Marin feel afraid when they see us on the street,” he said. “Maybe they think we are going to assault them. Also, people think we are here to take away their jobs, that we are part of the

problem.” The reality, Mundo said, is that “we are only looking for opportunities we didn’t have in our own countries. We are not taking away jobs. We are building your new fence, painting your house, taking care of your children. We are here supporting this community and helping make this country be powerful in the world.

“Candalaria gave me the space to talk about these things,” Mundo said. “It was more of a conversation, and I felt comfortable with her. It made me realize that Marin is part of my life and my history, and I am a part of the history of Marin, part of the history of California.

“And now I have a different point of view about working in this community. I saw that rather than just being mad and negative, I could use critical thinking to make a difference in people’s lives.

“We are building a history here, and I want to empower people to help themselves and be successful. Because I don’t think people will risk their lives, leave their family behind and then come to this country to be dependent. They are coming with the hope and dream to get a better opportunity. And I think there are big opportunities here for everyone to move into the mainstream.”

Mundo, who left everything behind to come to the United States, sees education as a way to achieve the independence he values. He will graduate from Marin Community College in December and plans to attend the University of San Francisco next spring to study public administration. Working at the Welcome Center will still be part of his life. “I don’t want to say there is a problem in the community and do nothing about it. I want to work with everyone to find a solution.”

Santa Ana Teens (continued from page 1)

Writers become budding photographers

After the master class, Miller and Cronmiller sent out letters to a small group of the most promising students, inviting them to participate in the photography part of the project, to take place after school and on weekends. Ten students accepted: Orlando Vences, Diego Lopez, Gabriela Esqueda, Guillermo Arroyo, Yesanil Seaman, Brenda Tenorio, Isabel Chacon, Sam Flores, Hilda Lagunas and Victor Ayala. From that point on until the middle of April, the 10 turned their camera lenses on their own lives

Working with them were Allison Miller and PoetryXchange art director José Flores, a photographer and technology consultant. Every Saturday or Sunday for almost three and a half months, Miller and Flores, carrying two Nikon digital cameras purchased especially for the project, would meet up with two kids from the group — a different two every week — give them the cameras, and set off on photo shoots, which often lasted all day.

“We went to Fourth Street in downtown Santa Ana, to a Santa Ana park where one of the kids played when he was younger, and even to the immigration office with one of the kids. We went wherever they wanted to go,” Miller said.

After the shooting session, Flores and Miller sat down with the kids on a park bench or in a café and reviewed the day’s work on a laptop they had brought along. “That was one of the great things about using digital cameras. The kids could see their work immediately and get comments on it,” Miller said. “And the kids didn’t have to learn about f-stops or shutter speeds before being able to take a photo. We wanted them to decide beforehand what story they wanted to tell and to think about that as they looked through the viewfinder, and then to make adjustments to capture their vision.”

In addition to weekend outings, Miller and Flores met the kids at the high school one day a week after school to show on a big screen the photographs taken the previous weekend. “The two kids



Photo/Yesanil Seaman, age 18.

involved would talk about what happened that day, what shots they liked, and what shots they missed,” Miller said.

The photographs were also uploaded to the PoetryXchange website, where they were available to all the kids. Those who didn’t have website access received the photos on CDs.

Exhibiting the students’ work

In late March, Miller and Flores asked the young photographers to select 15 of their favorite photos for the final exhibits from the hundreds they had taken. From that group of 150, 60 were chosen.

The Old Orange County Courthouse in Santa Ana was the setting of the most comprehensive display of the

Teen Perspectives (continued from page 3)

by a horse. He returned to the United States to continue his education. He enjoys playing soccer, DJing, school and his family. Before this project, he studied photography at Santa Ana High School for one year.

One thing I would change in my life is the fact that, as Hispanics, we are a minority of people who attend college. I would like to go to college to improve my socioeconomic life and also to know how it feels being the first in my family.

Yesanil Seaman was born on a clear, beautiful day in Sonora, Obregon, Mexico in 1987. She emigrated here with her parents when she was 2. She has liked writing since she was a child and wrote her first autobiography at 12.

I cover my face with strands of my own dark black hair. I pass through the blondes and the redheads down to my own kind. There weren’t many of us at the time. The others look down on us and snicker as we pass by. It was my second year in Santiago Elementary and already I was picked on. I was mute to the teacher. Mrs. Charles was her name. Her short blonde hair in front of me, always in front of me. I hardly ever saw her face. I was glad not to. Her eyes so icy cold blue.

Her shame fell upon me. I was alone and could not speak. I could not understand anything she said. I did my best. I knew I did, but it never was enough. Never.

Oh, how I hated going to school. I remember asking my teacher how she turned her blonde hair into brown. She said, “I used a crayon and rubbed it on my hair!” She laughed, but I didn’t. At home I asked for a box of crayons. Yellow was the color I chose.

I rubbed and rubbed the crayon wax on my hair and yet it remained black. I cried that night because I knew that the next day they would pick on me again. To them I was just another “wall jumper,” as an old man had called me the afternoon I accidentally kicked a ball into his yard. He was a mean old man with a voice that made me tremble as I passed by his house.

Brenda Tenorio, 17, was born in Chicago and moved to Santa Ana when she was 4. Her parents were born in Morelia, Michoacan. She is interested in cheerleading, poetry, abstract art and music.



Photo/Isabel Chacon, age 18.

My mom is the youngest girl out of seven kids. She had a rough childhood. Half of the time there was no food or clothes. She always tells me about having to share one room with all her brothers and sisters and that everyone had a spot on the floor. Or about the times her oldest sister would take her to the store. They wanted a torta with ham and cheese, but her mom gave her oldest sister just enough for a torta with beans. And the way she wanted to go to school but they never had enough money to buy books or the uniform. My mom found a way to go to school. She never gave up on that.

Isabel Chacon was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico in 1987. She came to Santa Ana at age 5 to start school.

My mom was born in Mexicali, Baja California, and my dad was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco. My dad is a little less than three years older than my mom. My mom tells me that one time when she was a teenager, she and her family went on a little vacation to Guadalajara. She went shopping with her younger sister to San Juan de Dios. She passed by a little soccer store and saw a guy. She thought he was cute, so she passed by it again and again and again until the guy finally came out of the store. They stared at each other a long time until the guy said, ‘Hola, yo soy David y tu?’ Eventually, that would start up a lot of things, and that guy would become my dad.

teens' work. Other exhibits were held at the Cerritos Library and at Santa Ana High School's annual "Art on the Lawn" event. The exhibits featured the teens' photographs and descriptive narratives produced in the writing sessions.

The opening event at the Court-house featured presentations by UC Irvine Professor of Education Gil Conchas, CCH board member Patricia O'Brien, and Wells Fargo Vice President and project supporter Amando de la Libertad. "They all congratulated the students on their inspiring work and told them how important it was to the community," Cronmiller said. The teens also received certificates of recognition from Santa Ana Councilman Jose Solorio.

"The exhibit was huge for them," Miller said. "It was surprising to



Photo/Victor Ayala.

Sam Flores, 17, was born in Orange County, but his parents came from Mexico. He's been a boy scout, a football player, a wrestler and, now, a photographer. His room is painted black.

The thing that makes my house horrible is the people living in it. Nine people under one roof with three bedrooms and one bathroom. They are the meanest, most ill-mannered, disgusting people you will ever meet. I wake up at 5:30 am to get to the restroom for a nice hot shower. It's a real struggle in the morning just to have at least two minutes for yourself. Dinner is the same way. It is based on a first-come, first-served basis. It's like a pack of lions going for one gazelle. No matter how hard it is, though, they are still family and I care about them.

Hilda Lagunas was born in Guerrero, Mexico in 1986.

When I was 5 years old I remember my mother packing her clothes in a suitcase. I looked around the room and wondered where we were going. Then she came up to me and said, "Everything is going to be fine." When she said that, I got scared and ran to the living room toward a corner and huddled by myself. Next to me was an old sofa, where my grandmother would sit everyday. The corner was dark and small, and it made me feel



Photo/Hilda Lagunas, age 19

them that they even have a story, and more surprising that anybody would find it interesting. A lot of them think that people don't care about their story. I think it changed the way they thought about themselves. They could pick up a camera and be artists."

"People who saw the prints were amazed that high school kids took them," Miller said. "The woman who worked at the place where we had the prints processed and who grew up in Santa Ana told me she had never seen the place look so beautiful. 'You can tell that the people who took the photographs really cared about the way they represented Santa Ana,'" she told me.

The 10 photography students have gone on with their lives since the project ended. Most of them are attending college. but many want to stay involved with Poetry-Xchange. "We're now conducting a similar project at El Sol Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Santa Ana elementary school," Cronmiller said. "And four or five of the kids want to work with us part time to keep alive their interest in photography and art. We're hoping to find



Photo/Gabriela Esqueda, age 18.

ways to keep them involved. We just wish we could do more – for these kids and for all the others."

For more information about the project and to view the students' photographs, visit www.poetryxchange.org/aquiahora.

Editor's note: This is one of a series of articles about five photography projects involving immigrant and refugee youth supported by the Council as part of its April 2005 California Stories Uncovered campaign.

safe. My mother came out of the room. It didn't have a door and was only big enough for one small bed and an old broken chair. She started looking for me. I wouldn't get out of the corner. I was terrified of what was going on.

Victor Ayala was born in Mexico and came to the United States when he was 3. A survivor of physical and sexual abuse, Victor is active in the arts and likes drawing, graphic design, photography, drama and singing. He would like to move to San Francisco and have a career in fashion.

My child life was really a mystery to many. I liked 90 percent of the things most people hated the most. One thing I remember liking was my house. My house was a 19th-century house, colored blue, and it had these three pillars made of bricks. It always had this fresh smell because of the bricks. And during the spring when all the flowers and trees had their "showing off" day, we could smell the fresh lemons coming from one of the trees outside the window in the living room.

The rooms were huge. The white walls and old furniture just made you feel at home. But one day everything changed when we received a letter from city hall stating that the people in the house had to move because the city had to open a street. Now all the fun times growing up in a big home with green everywhere — it's all gone, covered up with blacktop and cement. Now it's just a street. And what's so sad is that I never took a picture of that perfect house. One day, when I get old and start a family, I hope they believe me.

Who We Are

The mission of the California Council for the Humanities is to foster understanding between people and encourage their engagement in community life through the public use of the humanities.

The Council is an independent, not-for-profit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities supported through a public-private partnership that includes funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, private foundations and corporations. The Council also receives essential support from individuals.

To learn more about the Council and how you can participate in its programs, please visit us online at www.californiastories.org.

CCH Board Members

CHARLENE WEAR SIMMONS
Assistant Director
California Research Bureau
California State Library
Sacramento

PAULA WOODS
Vice Chair
Author and Editor
Los Angeles

JULIE BORNSTEIN
Executive Director
Campaign for Affordable Housing
Los Angeles

JESÚS CHAVARRÍA
Publisher and Chief Executive Officer
Hispanic Business, Inc.
Santa Barbara

BENJAMIN T. DURAN
Superintendent and President
Merced College
Merced

ROY EISENHARDT
Attorney
San Francisco

PERCIVAL EVERETT
Novelist and English Professor
College of Arts, Letters & Sciences
University of Southern California
Los Angeles

DOUGLAS GREENBERG
President and Chief Executive Officer
Survivors of Shoah
Visual History Foundation
Los Angeles

NANCY HATAMIYA
Chief of Staff
Office of California State
Assemblymember Pedro Nava
Sacramento

JUAN FELIPE HERRERA
Tomas Rivera Endowed Chair
Department of Creative Writing
University of California, Riverside

MARIA HERRERA-SOBEK
Acting Associate Vice Chancellor
for Academic Policy
and Professor of Chicano Studies
University of California, Santa Barbara

JOAN KLEIN JACOBS
Philanthropist and Arts Patron
San Diego

Staff

San Francisco Office
312 Sutter Street, Suite 601
San Francisco, CA 94108
415/391.1474

JIM QUAY
Executive Director

RALPH LEWIN
Associate Executive Director

JULIE LEVAK
Director of External Affairs

ALDEN MUDGE
Director of Organizational Effectiveness

KAREN RODRIGUEZ
Director of Operations

LAUREN ALEXANDER
Executive Assistant

MAURA HURLEY
Public Information Officer

SUSANA LOZA
Programs Manager

LUCY LE NGUYEN
Coordinator of Organizational
Effectiveness

JODY SAHOTA
Organizational Effectiveness
Coordinator

CARLOS TORRES
Operations Coordinator

ANN YOSHINAGA
Development Coordinator

Los Angeles Office
315 W. Ninth Street, Suite 702
Los Angeles, CA 90015
213/623.5993

FELICIA KELLEY
Senior Programs Manager

CALEB KIM
Operations Assistant

San Diego Office
921 25th Street
San Diego, CA 92102
619/232.4020

AMY ROUILLARD
Senior Programs Manager

© 2005 The California Council for the
Humanities

California Council for the Humanities

network

INSIDE Putting a human face on the Marin County housing crisis

HUMANITIES

November 2005

www.californiastories.org

INSIDE Immigrant teens
in Santa Ana turn cameras
on their lives

312 Sutter Street, Suite 601
San Francisco, CA 94108

Return Service Requested

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE
PAID
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
PERMIT NO. 11379

